

TRACKS in the Grass



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The Inner Mongolian grassland is beautiful and fresh after last night's rain. Early in the morning the 13-year-old Wuligetu and his younger sister Chichig, of Mongolian nationality, are off on their ponies to graze the commune's flock of sheep.





Suddenly Wuligetu notices that the grass has been trodden. He dismounts to have a look and finds deep camel tracks.

**Who has passed by? Is it the army-militia joint patrol?
No, they ride horses. It's not the herders either; there
is no sign of sheep. The children begin to wonder.**



Wuligetu says, "Chairman Mao teaches us that '*under no circumstances must we relax our vigilance.*' Yesterday Father told me that a herder had his camel stolen while he was shopping at the Banner store. Could these tracks have been made by that camel?" "What are we going to do?" Chichig asks anxiously.





The sun rises higher and the grassland is covered in mist. As Wuligetu approaches the fringe of the Gobi Desert the grass becomes sparser.



The trail is difficult to follow. But Wuligetu remembers his father telling him that the Gobi stones are worn smooth on top by the wind and rain, while underneath they are rough. Wuligetu finds some of the stones turned over. This gives him a clue in following the trail.





He rides back quickly to tell his sister. "You go to the sentry-post at once, Chichig, and call Father," he says. "Leave the flock with Shepherd Dog Duripo. I'll follow those tracks!" Chichig rides off immediately.



Wuligetu pats the sleek, furry dog and says, "We have a job to do, Duripo. You must guard the flock." The dog wags its tail as it looks at its young master. Then the boy points to the flock and commands, "Go!" The dog races to the bellwether.



Wuligetu quickly returns to the edge of the Gobi, dismounts and leads his pony, carefully following in the camel tracks.



He reaches the Chumar River,
where there is a grove of leafy
wild date trees. Has the person
with the camel gone in there?
Wuligetu wonders.

But the tracks do not lead into the grove. Wuligetu follows them to the river bank and then crosses on his pony.



He searches
up and down
the opposite
bank but finds
no tracks.





So the person
hasn't crossed
the river,
thinks Wuligetu.
He rides back
across the river
and heads for
the grove.

Sure enough, this time he discovers the camel tracks going straight into the grove.



**So the person with the camel has tried to confuse
anyone who might follow him. Very suspicious!**





Wuligetu does not want his father and the other militia to be misled as he was, so he returns to the grassland, sticks his whip in the ground and lays stones in the shape of an arrow, both pointing to the grove.



Then he goes
to the grove
and tethers
his pony to
a tree.



Looking round,
he discovers
a man sitting
against a big
tree. He is
puffing on a
cigarette.



Wuligetu goes up to the man and asks, "What are you doing here?" The man is startled, springs to his feet and starts to run.



Wuligetu quickly blocks his way and demands, "Where are you going?"

"To see a friend," replies the man.

"Who's your friend?"

"Sumia, of Paoyintu Brigade."



Sumia! That's Father. Can this man be a friend of my father? Wuligetu has his doubts. "When did you know Sumia?" he inquires.

**"Why, we were in the same army unit," the man bluffs.
"I was a soldier and he was my platoon commander."
Wuligetu asks the man's name and he answers, "Bazar."**



Bazar! The name is so familiar to Wuligetu! His father has told him so many stories of Uncle Bazar's bravery and resourcefulness in combats with the enemy.





Wuligetu has longed to meet Bazar, and now he is right before him! But the boy has second thoughts: Is the man really Uncle Bazar? Why did he try to cover his tracks when he went into the grove?



The man pats Wuligetu on the shoulder like an old friend. "I've got a younger brother here — the frontier guards' company commander. I've got to see him too. Where's the sentry-post?"



Just then Wuligetu
hears a camel grunt
not far away. So,
is this not an im-
postor, the man that
stole the camel!

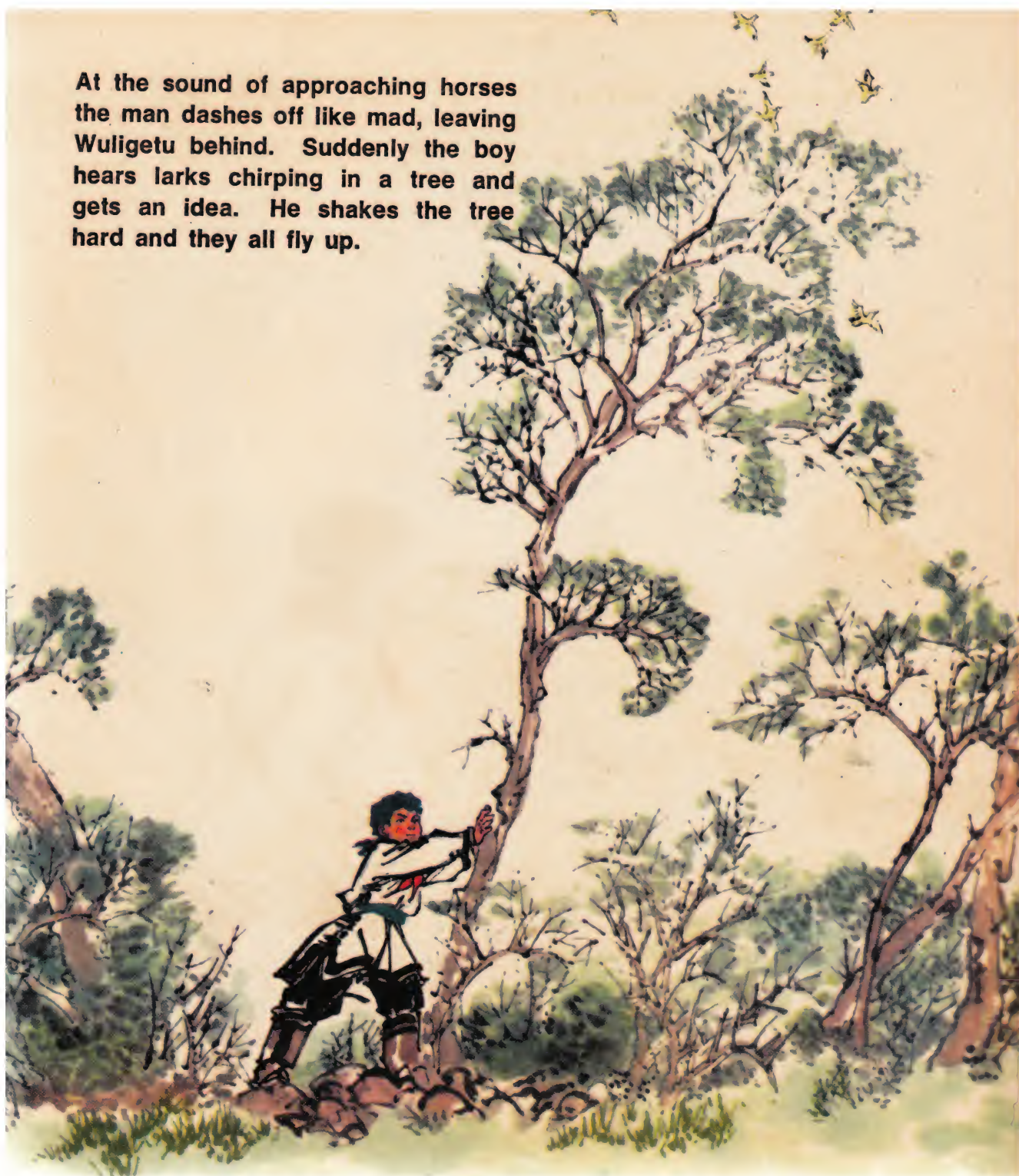


Blinking boyishly he replies, "I don't know where the sentry-post is, but I did see some People's Liberation Army frontier guards heading this way. You can ask them." The man looks scared.

He runs deeper into the grove, picking his way aimlessly. Wuligetu runs after him.



At the sound of approaching horses the man dashes off like mad, leaving Wuligetu behind. Suddenly the boy hears larks chirping in a tree and gets an idea. He shakes the tree hard and they all fly up.



The man knows that this is the boy's signal. Desperate now, he returns and lunges at Wuligetu with a dagger. Wuligetu is not a bit afraid of this enemy. He dodges the thrust.





The man falls. The dagger sticks in a tree. Wuligetu picks up a handful of sand and throws it into the man's face before he can get to his feet.

"Catch the bad egg!" Wuligetu shouts at the top of his voice. In a panic the man grabs Wuligetu by the arm. Wuligetu sinks his teeth into the man's wrist till he cries out and lets go of the boy.



Wuligetu runs. The man picks up a stone, hurls it at Wuligetu but misses. He is just about to throw another when militia men and women with rifles arrive on the scene.





"Stop!" shouts Sumia, commander of the militia. A fighter whom Wuligetu has never seen before quickly ties up the bad man. Sumia turns to his son and says, "This is Bazar, the uncle you've longed to see."



Overjoyed at the victory, Wuligetu and the militia return with their captive under escort. He is found to be an agent sent over the border by the enemy. After listening to conversations between Bazar and other comrades at the bus station, he has stolen a camel and tried to obtain secret information, only to fall into the people's dragnet.





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